

ORGANIZATION OF THE NAVY MEDICAL DEPARTMENT*

LOUIS H. RODDIS, M.D., F.A.C.P.

CAPTAIN, MEDICAL CORPS, UNITED STATES NAVY; EDITOR, UNITED STATES NAVAL
MEDICAL BULLETIN, WASHINGTON, D.C.

THE principal divisions of the Medical Department of the Navy are:

Medical Corps
Dental Corps
Pharmacists
Nurse Corps
Hospital Corps

The first of these, the *Medical Corps*, is made up of physicians who are graduates of recognized medical schools. These men are selected after careful physical and professional examinations. For appointment to the Medical Corps of the regular Navy, they must also be citizens of the United States and less than thirty-two years of age. The number of medical officers in the Navy, as prescribed by law, is $6\frac{1}{2}$ per thousand of the total authorized strength of the Navy and Marine Corps; thus, if the total strength of the Navy and Marine Corps were 100,000, 650 medical officers would be required.

The *Dental Corps* is made up of dentists who must be under thirty-two years of age, graduates of recognized dental schools, and who also must pass a rigid physical and professional examination. The proportion of dental officers is one for every 500 of the authorized strength of the Navy.

The *Pharmacists* are not as definitely allotted by law. At present there are about 200 for the whole Navy. In addition to the

* The opinions or assertions contained herein are the private ones of the writer and are not to be construed as official or reflecting the views of the Navy Department or the Naval Service at large.

practice of pharmacy, they carry on the details of finance and property accounting.

The *Nurse Corps* is made up of women nurses who must be graduates of recognized nursing schools and not more than twenty-eight years of age at entrance into the Navy. The proportion of nurses is three per thousand of the authorized strength of the Navy.

The *Hospital Corps* is made up of enlisted men and consists of 3½ per cent of the total authorized enlisted strength of the Navy and Marine Corps. The men of this corps do much of the nursing work, first aid, and practical pharmaceutical work. For various reasons, women cannot be employed at these tasks on combat ships or in the field.

The task of the Medical Department of the Navy is a very large one. It includes the physical selection of all personnel, the maintenance of health, and the care of the sick and injured, as well as the removal by retirement of those who have become permanently disabled or are unfit for further active service. It must be remembered, too, that this work has to be carried out both afloat and ashore, and in many parts of the world under varying climatic conditions and in widely diverse surroundings. Also, the civil population of some of our island possessions beyond the seas, notably Samoa and Guam, is entirely dependent upon the Medical Department of the Navy for all medical care.

The administrative head of the Medical Department of the Navy is the *Surgeon General*, who is the chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery. He is appointed by the President for a period of four years.

THE BUREAU OF MEDICINE AND SURGERY

The Bureau of Medicine and Surgery is the central administrative organization of the Medical Department. It is one of five bureaus established in the Navy Department by the Act of Congress of August 31, 1842. This Act provided that the several bureaus should retain the charge of records and accounts pertaining to their respective duties, such duties to be

performed under authority of the Secretary of the Navy. The orders of these bureaus are considered as emanating from him and having the full force and effect of his authority.

Duties and Responsibilities.—In order to give an idea of the work of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, it would, perhaps, be best to quote directly from the U. S. Navy Regulations the duties and responsibilities attached to this Bureau:

SECTION 1.—DUTIES OF THE BUREAU OF MEDICINE AND SURGERY

457

1. The Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, under the direction of the Secretary of the Navy, is charged with and responsible for the maintenance of the health of the Navy, for the care of the sick and injured, for the custody and preservation of the records, accounts, and properties under its cognizance and pertaining to its duties, and for the professional education and training of officers, nurses, and enlisted men of the Medical Department of the Navy.

2. It is charged with the upkeep and operation of all naval hospitals, medical supply depots, medical laboratories, the Naval Medical School and of all technical schools established for the education or training of members of the Medical Corps, Dental Corps, Nurse Corps, and Hospital Corps, and with their repairs, except as excluded in article 484.

458

1. The Bureau of Medicine and Surgery shall provide for inspection of the sanitary condition of the Navy, shall recommend with respect to all questions connected with hygiene and sanitation affecting the service, and, to this end, shall have opportunity for necessary inspection; it shall advise with other bureaus and offices in reference to the sanitary features of ships under construction and in commission regarding berthing, ventilation, and location of quarters for the care and treatment of the sick and injured; of the provisions for the care of wounded in battle; and, in the case of shore stations, with regard to health conditions depending on location, the hygienic construction and care of public buildings, especially of barracks and other habitations, such as camps. It shall also advise concerning matters pertaining to clothing and food, to water supplies used for drinking, cooking, and bathing purposes, and to drainage and disposal of wastes, so

far as these affect the health of the Navy. It shall safeguard the personnel by the employment of the best methods of hygiene and sanitation, both afloat and ashore, with a view to maintaining the highest possible percentage of the personnel ready for service at all times, and shall adopt for use all such devices or procedures as may be developed in the sciences of medicine and surgery as will in any way tend to an increase in military efficiency.

2. It shall be the duty of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery to provide for the physical examination of officers, nurses, and enlisted men, with a view to the selection or retention of those only whose physical condition is such as to maintain or improve the military efficiency of the service if admitted or retained therein; and it shall pass upon the competency, from a professional standpoint, of all men of the Hospital Corps for enlistment, enrollment, and promotion by means of examinations conducted under its supervision or by such forms as it may prescribe.

3. The Bureau of Medicine and Surgery shall recommend to the Bureau of Navigation the complement of Medical Department personnel for hospitals and hospital ships, and shall recommend and have information as to the assignment and duties of medical officers, dental officers, and hospital corpsmen. It shall be charged with the administration of the Nurse Corps, and shall have power to appoint and remove all nurses, subject to the approval of the Secretary of the Navy.

4. It shall require for and have control of the preparation, inspection, reception, storage, care, custody, transfer and issue of all supplies of every kind used in the Medical Department for its own purposes; and shall have charge of the civilian force employed at naval hospitals, medical supply depots, medical laboratories, the Naval Medical School, and at all technical schools for the education or training of Medical Department personnel.

5. It shall approve the design of hospital ships insofar as relates to their efficiency for the care of the sick and wounded, and shall provide for the organization and administration of the Medical Department of such vessels.

6. The arrangements for care, transportation, and burial of the dead shall be under the jurisdiction and control of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, except as otherwise provided in article 1841.

Organization.—To carry out the tasks laid down by the Regulations, which have been quoted above, requires a complete and thorough organization of both the Bureau and of the

entire Medical Department. The main features of this organization will now be briefly described: First, the Bureau itself consists of the office of the Surgeon General and Assistant Chief of Bureau. Under these men as directing heads are the following divisions:

| | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| Hospitals and Inspections | Finance |
| Planning | Preventive Medicine |
| Chief Clerk | Publications |
| Dental Corps | Aviation Medicine |
| Medical Corps | Physical Qualifications |
| Hospital Corps | and Records |
| Nurse Corps | |

While the titles of these divisions are almost self-explanatory as to their duties, a few words may be added in regard to the tasks of some of them. For example, the *Division of Personnel* is responsible for the admission of personnel to the service, their transfer and movement from one station to another, their examinations for promotion, their leave and other similar matters. The *Division of Finance* has to do with the preparation of the budgets and the approval of requisitions required to purchase supplies and equipment for the Medical Department throughout the world. A division of great importance is that of *Physical Qualifications and Records*. Records are to be found here of personnel extending back to the War of 1812. Another division which is of great value is that of *Preventive Medicine*. It is said that in civilian life the specialty of the general practitioner is obstetrics. It may almost be said that the specialty of the Naval surgeon is preventive medicine.

In the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery there is another important office—that of the *Chief Clerk*. The Chief Clerk is a civilian who has charge of and is responsible for civilian personnel. He is the assistant to the Surgeon General in regard to the entire administrative machinery of the Bureau.

Another division of considerable interest is that of *Publications*. Various technical books and manuals, such as the Handbook of the Hospital Corps and also the Reports of the Surgeon General of the Navy, are prepared and published for the

use of the Medical Department. In addition, the Navy publishes a medical journal devoted to naval and military medicine. This journal, known as the *United States Naval Medical Bulletin*, was founded in 1907. It was for a long time the only journal devoted to naval medicine published in the Americas.

Another important unit, though not directly a part of the Bureau, deals with important Bureau policies. This is the *Advisory Board*, organized for the purpose of assisting the Surgeon General particularly with the work of postgraduate instruction. It also is concerned with other matters, especially the preparation of scientific and professional books and periodicals needed by the Medical Department. This board selects officers for postgraduate instruction in civilian medical schools and for special work in the Naval Medical School.

FACILITIES FOR THE TRAINING OF MEDICAL PERSONNEL

NAVAL MEDICAL SCHOOL: POSTGRADUATE INSTRUCTION

The Naval Medical School, Washington, D. C., is a school of postgraduate instruction that specializes in the subjects of naval medicine. It is the only school giving instruction in this specialty in the United States, and is the largest and most important one in the Western Hemisphere. Furthermore, its library contains the largest collection of books, periodicals, pamphlets, pictures and other data on nautical medicine to be found in the New World. The Naval Medical School forms a part, with the Naval Hospital and the Dental School, of a great medical group known as the Naval Medical Center, Washington, D. C. One other important function of the Naval Medical School should be noted. The school serves as a consulting center for the entire Naval Service. Medical officers in all parts of the world send pathologic specimens here for diagnostic study and confirmation.

SCHOOLS FOR HOSPITAL CORPSMEN

Other important instruction carried out under the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery includes the training of hospital corpsmen. There are two training schools regularly maintained

—one at Norfolk, Virginia, and the other at San Diego, California. In these schools instruction is given in first aid, elementary pharmacy and chemistry, elementary hygiene and sanitation, nursing and similar subjects, as well as military drill. Special instruction also is given in various technical branches to train men as technicians in the fields of *x*-ray, laboratory pharmacy, dental prosthesis and related fields.

NAVAL HOSPITALS AND OTHER FACILITIES FOR TREATMENT AND EXAMINATION

The Navy maintains a number of large and important Naval hospitals within the continental limits of the United States and three more beyond the seas. The latter are at Canacao, Philippine Islands; Pearl Harbor, Territory of Hawaii, and Guam. Naval hospitals, like large general hospitals in civil life, contain patients with a great variety of pathological conditions requiring every sort of treatment. These hospitals are equipped with every facility to be found in the largest and finest civilian hospitals. Some idea of the volume of work which passes through them may be obtained from the data of a recent calendar year, when more than 30,000 surgical operations were performed, while there also took place many minor procedures, such as cystoscopies, bronchoscopies and similar examinations.

The largest single group of diseases cared for in our hospitals is the group of communicable diseases transmitted by oral and nasal discharges. This group furnishes almost one third of all admissions to the sick list. Wounds and injuries attributable to the many hazards peculiar to naval and military life are another important cause of morbidity. These injuries provide about 10 per cent of all original admissions to the sick list. Many of them occur in the operation of submarines, the handling of guns and ammunition aboard ship, falls through hatches and from masts, falls overboard, and similar accidents.

The Naval hospitals are organized with the usual clinical and professional services. Each hospital has surgical, medical, eye, ear, nose and throat, and urological services, as well as facilities for roentgenology and physiotherapy, and laboratory.

neuropsychiatric and dental work. To most of the hospitals, an out-patient clinic is attached. In each hospital are important administrative groups. These are: a personnel and record office; a property and accounting office; a commissary; a disbursing office; a maintenance department. There also is a group in charge of morale and training activities in connection with the instruction of hospital corpsmen on duty at the hospitals. The administrative head of our hospitals is the medical officer-in-command, whose chief assistant is the executive officer. An officer of the day who is the direct representative of the Commanding Officer is on duty at all times in our hospitals.

HOSPITAL SHIPS

An interesting activity of the Medical Department is that of the hospital ships. These are in effect floating hospitals designed to accompany the Fleet, and to furnish hospitalization in any part of the world where the Fleet may go. These ships have to be moderately large, commodious, comfortable, and fairly fast. Their medical facilities include practically every service found in a hospital ashore.

MOBILE BASE HOSPITALS

Mobile base hospitals are hospitals which can be assembled and their personnel and material moved to distant points, where they furnish hospitalization, particularly to advanced bases and Marine expeditionary forces.

MEDICAL DEPARTMENTS OF SHIPS AND SHORE STATIONS

The number of medical departments of ships and shore stations runs into hundreds. Every ship and shore station, except the smallest, is equipped with a medical department which includes a pharmacy, a medical storeroom, an examining room, a ward and, in most instances, a small isolation unit. While the hospitals supply definitive treatment, these medical departments of ships and shore stations everywhere supply the temporary medical service to the officers and men of the ships or stations. They handle all acute conditions, all immediate

emergencies, and provide the preventive medical service necessary to maintain the health of the command. A medical officer heads all these activities. He is often like the country practitioner in a small town, with many of the same professional problems, and in addition, those of a military organization.

DISPENSARIES AND NAVY YARDS

Dispensaries and navy yards have an important task in connection not only with the care of Naval personnel but also with the provision of emergency treatment for civil employees. The medical officers of dispensaries of the yards have also the problems of industrial medicine to deal with in their regular work.

RECRUITING STATIONS AND TRAINING STATIONS

Medical officers, of course, are necessary at recruiting stations to carry on physical examinations of recruits. The physical selection of personnel is one of the most important tasks of the Medical Department. It requires not only the professional knowledge necessary to make physical examinations, but an intimate acquaintance with the requirements of the Naval Service in order to select properly the best men. In the training stations these newly recruited men are again studied and many of the unfit eliminated during their period of training.

DENTAL SERVICE

As has been mentioned, the Dental Corps consists of dental officers in proportion of one to every 500 men of the Navy. The dental officers furnish complete dental care. Great attention is given by the Dental Corps to prophylaxis and the prevention of various dental diseases, and the relationship of dental infections to general pathologic conditions.

MEDICAL SERVICE WITH THE MARINE CORPS

It generally is not realized that the medical service of the Marine Corps is supplied by the Medical Corps of the Navy. Yet this is the case, and to provide this service an organization of medical troops similar in general character to that of Army

units but still retaining special Naval features is required. The organization of these units is too extensive a subject to go into in detail, but it will suffice to say that the medical service of the Marine Corps is almost a separate specialty of naval medicine in itself.

NAVAL MEDICAL SUPPLY DEPOTS

The Navy has several large depots and storehouses from which medical, surgical and hospital supplies and equipment are purchased for use in the Navy. These depots are responsible not only for the purchase and accounting of supplies, but also for the testing of materials obtained, to make sure that they meet specifications. The depots are also responsible for the filling of requisitions, and the shipments of these supplies to hundreds of medical department units throughout the Navy.

NAVAL RESERVE

The Naval Reserve is made up of officers and men who are civilians engaged in civil pursuits. These men are organized into Naval training units to receive short periods of training in duties pertaining to various branches of the Naval Service. In the case of the Reserve force of the Medical Department, there are included physicians, dentists, pharmacists, nurses and trained technicians, subject to call in time of national emergency. Careful physical and professional selection has been exercised in the formation of the Reserve Force of the Medical Department, and it often includes the outstanding professional people of a community. The medical men and dental officers are frequently organized into hospital units. The whole plan is intended to furnish rapid expansion and augmentation of the regular Medical Department in time of war or similar national emergencies.

CONCLUSION

It must not be forgotten that the Navy is a military organization, and that its medical service is organized and designed for a military purpose. The Navy forms a floating defense about the nation and its possessions, behind which the ordinary pursuits of the ordinary citizen can be carried on in safety

from the attacks of any aggressor. And, too, it must not be forgotten that the essential units of the Navy are not steel ships. It is the men who really make a Navy, and the maintenance of the health and physical fitness of the officers and men is the primary purpose of the Navy's Medical Department. All parts of the medical department are organized with one objective, that of maintaining the physical efficiency of the personnel so that the maximum military efforts of the Navy can always be available. As Lord Nelson once very aptly said, "The very greatest thing in the military service is health."

Division of Publications
Bureau of Medicine & Surgery
Navy Department